



MARCH 2021

# “This is Our House!”

A Preliminary Assessment of the  
Capitol Hill Siege Participants

Program on Extremism

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THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

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**The views and conclusions contained in this document are those of the authors and should not be interpreted as necessarily representing the official policies, either expressed or implied, of the George Washington University. The details contained in the court documents are allegations. Defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.**



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On January 6, 2021, a mob of protestors violently breached the United States Capitol with the intent of disrupting the United States' electoral process, leaving a trail of violence, destruction, and desecration in their wake. As a result of the unrest five individuals, including U.S. Capitol Police Officer Brian Sicknick, were killed; over 100 people were injured.

In the weeks following the siege, the Department of Justice and Federal Bureau of Investigation launched a nationwide effort to bring those involved in January 6th to justice. At the time of writing, 257 individuals have been charged in federal courts for their involvement.

This report aims to provide a preliminary assessment of the siege participants. While the authors are cognizant that more individuals are likely to be charged in the future, and not one individual has yet been convicted in a court of law, the documents released thus far yield significant insight into the nexus between the siege participants and a wide array of domestic violent extremist (DVE) ideologies, actors, and movements. As such, this is a preliminary report. However, as ongoing conversations about how best to respond to January 6th have the potential to shape policy, taking stock of the allegations against participants can help inform more nuanced discourse and effective policymaking.

The report's main findings are as follows:

- The 257 alleged siege participants charged in federal court thus far represent a heterogeneous group. Individuals as young as 18 and as old as 70 have been charged. 221 are men and 36 are women. They came to the Capitol from 40 states, and 91% traveled from outside the Washington, DC metropolitan area. 33 individuals have known military backgrounds.
- The charges brought against this group are equally diverse. Alleged perpetrators face as many as 17 counts on their indictment. The charges range from trespassing and illegal entry on designated grounds to conspiracy against the U.S. government and assaulting law enforcement.
- This report categorizes participants in the Capitol Hill siege according to three distinct categories: militant networks, organized clusters, and inspired

believers. The authors define each of those categories and provide important case studies based on available court records, interviews, and other reporting.

- Based on this report's findings, we recommend that the U.S. government improve access to data on domestic terrorism investigations, conduct a systematic review of intelligence gathering and policy response to domestic terrorism alerts, and use existing structures to improve information-sharing between the federal agencies tasked with combating domestic violent extremism.

## INTRODUCTION

January 6, 2021 marks a dark page in American history. The images of a mob fighting their way into the Capitol and storming some of the most sacred halls of American democracy will be ingrained in the public psyche for years to come. Yet, as shocking as these images are, the assault was not completely unexpected. Some elements had been openly discussing attacking the Capitol building on various social media platforms in the weeks preceding January 6th. In many ways, the Capitol siege represented the culmination of a season of political tension that seems far from finished.

Over the last few years, in fact, we have witnessed a remarkable growth of what is commonly referred to as domestic extremism. The term is used in American law enforcement and policy circles to distinguish it from foreign extremism, a category that refers largely to individuals inspired by or linked to jihadist groups. But it is a term that encompasses an extremely broad and ever-expanding plethora of groups and ideologies, including armed militias and committed conspiracy theorists, neo-Nazis and isolated anti-government militants with few common denominators beyond hate and propensity for violence. This universe has existed in America for decades, has grown more diverse, vocal, and violent in recent years, and has seized on current events such as the pandemic, rising community and law enforcement tensions following the death of George Floyd, and the presidential election to pose an even greater threat to American society.

This diversity was in full display among those who stormed the Capitol building on January 6th. The more than 250 individuals so far charged for their role in the siege include more established neo-Nazis and members of armed militias, but also individuals who belonged to ideologies more difficult to classify like the Boogaloo movement, or had simply been enthralled by various conspiratorial cults like QAnon. For years these somewhat incoherent ideological fringes have found a space on various social media platforms, expanding their reach, interacting with one another and occasionally coalescing into one—as they dramatically did, this time in person, on January 6th.

The aim of this report is to capture this diversity, providing a snapshot of those who actively participated in the storming of the Capitol building. Basing our analysis on the indictments and other court records, integrated with interviews with prosecutors



and law enforcement professionals involved in the investigations, we attempted to understand the demographics, connections, and motivations of the more than 250 individuals so far charged for their role in the siege. Coming out only two months after the facts, this report is inevitably an exploratory, imperfect and partial exercise, but still one that provides a solid, fact-based overview of what happened on January 6th and, to some degree, of the complex threat we are likely to see in the near future.

The report, a collective effort of our entire staff, is a testimony of the Program's long-standing commitment to providing fact-based analysis and policy solutions on all forms of extremism. Just a few months after its foundation, in October 2015, the Program had the privilege of being the venue where then Assistant Attorney General John Carlin announced the creation of the position of Domestic Terrorism Counsel at the Department of Justice and, since then, the Program has hosted an annual talk from the Counsel. The Program has also produced more than twenty reports and articles on topics such as the use of social media by right-wing extremists, the emergence of the Boogaloo movement, the transnational connections of American neo-Nazi militants, and the many legislative and policy issues related to domestic terrorism.

There is no question that the events of January 6th will have implications that go well beyond the legal vicissitudes of those involved in them. They have triggered a set of political and social debates that are likely to be with us for years to come and that will likely incite violence originating from the same milieu. We hope that this report, alongside other analyses coming from the Program and other research centers, will help to encourage debate that is fact-based and apolitical.

## FINDINGS

As of February 25th, almost two months after the Capitol Hill incursion, 257 individuals have been charged in federal court for their involvement in the siege. The following data are based on hundreds of court documents from U.S. court cases, Department of Justice press releases, Freedom of Information Act requests, interviews with U.S. government officials, and news articles that collectively provide detailed preliminary coverage of the alleged Capitol Hill siege perpetrators.<sup>1</sup>

The alleged perpetrators are by no means a homogenous group. Law enforcement have arrested individuals as young as 18 and as old as 70. Individuals were 40-years-old on average at the time of their arrest. Of the arrested, 221 (86%) were men and 36 (14%) women **(See figures 1 and 2)**.

Those charged so far for their participation in the siege came to Washington, DC from 40 states and from within the District of Columbia. In total, the alleged participants came from over 180 counties throughout the United States, with the highest total cases by county from Los Angeles County in California, Franklin County in Ohio, and Bucks County in Pennsylvania **(See figures 3 and 4)**.<sup>2</sup>

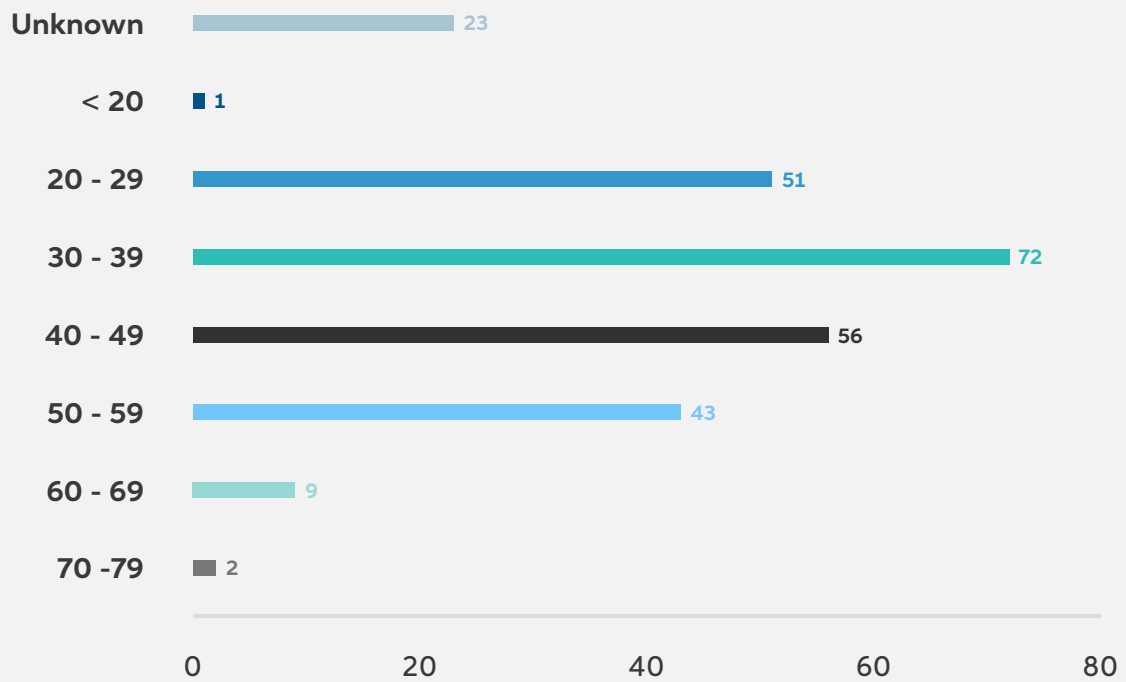
Program on Extremism researchers were able to identify 33 individuals with military backgrounds. These included 31 veterans, 1 current member of the National Guard, and 1 current member of the Army Reserves. 36% of individuals with military backgrounds also had concrete ties to various extremist organizations, including the Proud Boys (7), Oath Keepers (4), and Three Percenters (1) **(See figures 5 and 6)**.

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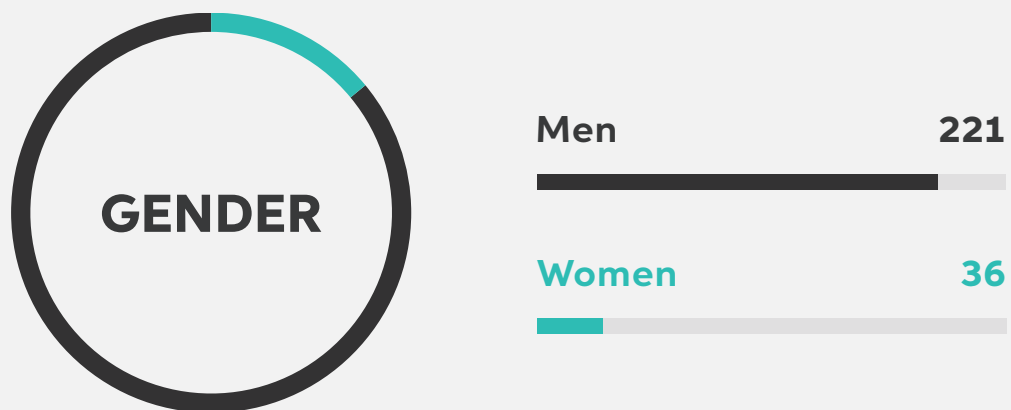
<sup>1</sup> The authors concluded observations on February 25, 2021, though the Program on Extremism continues to track new cases as they break, as well as developments in preexisting cases. The data relate to federal cases only. The Program on Extremism maintains a separate database of individuals indicted in the D.C. Superior Court, which is periodically updated and available on our website. See: [extremism.gwu.edu/Capitol-Hill-Cases](https://extremism.gwu.edu/Capitol-Hill-Cases). While court records in particular are generally reliable and accurate resources, some details may be missing or withheld. Program researchers examined all available court records and other open sources to make determinations for data entry, including criminal complaints and affidavits, indictments or information sheets, documents related to bond decisions, and more. Researchers also drew on open-source reporting to supplement any gaps in available court records.

<sup>2</sup> These figures represent total cases by county; when normalized by population, the highest cases by county per capita are from Baker County, Georgia, Mathews County, Virginia, and McLean County, Kentucky. Program on Extremism researchers were unable to verify the county of residence of four individuals in the dataset.

**FIGURE 1** | Age at Time of Arrest



**FIGURE 2** | Gender Breakdown of Alleged Perpetrators



Because of the unprecedented scale of the Capitol Hill siege, law enforcement nationwide has turned to all available resources to investigate and prosecute those involved. Of the 257 individuals charged in federal court, charging documents for 83% contained some form of evidence from social media linking them to the Capitol. 120 (47%) are alleged to have posted evidence on their personal social media accounts, and another 76 (30%) have been possibly incriminated by evidence on the social media accounts of their friends and others in their social networks. Charging documents for 18 (7%) contain both.<sup>3</sup>

Analysis of available records suggests that the social media evidence against the Capitol Hill extremists came in three forms: those who publicly indicated their intent prior to storming the Capitol (15%), those who documented their alleged crimes in real-time at the Capitol (68%), and those who took to social media to comment on the events that took place in the days and weeks that followed (25%) **(See figures 7 and 8).**<sup>4</sup>

The charges brought against alleged perpetrators are as diverse as the Capitol Hill mob itself. Some face a handful of charges in federal court for trespassing on Capitol Hill grounds and disrupting Congress. Others face over a dozen charges that range from assaulting law enforcement to theft of U.S. property to conspiracy against the U.S. government. On average, individuals received 5 charges total for their involvement in the Capitol Hill siege.

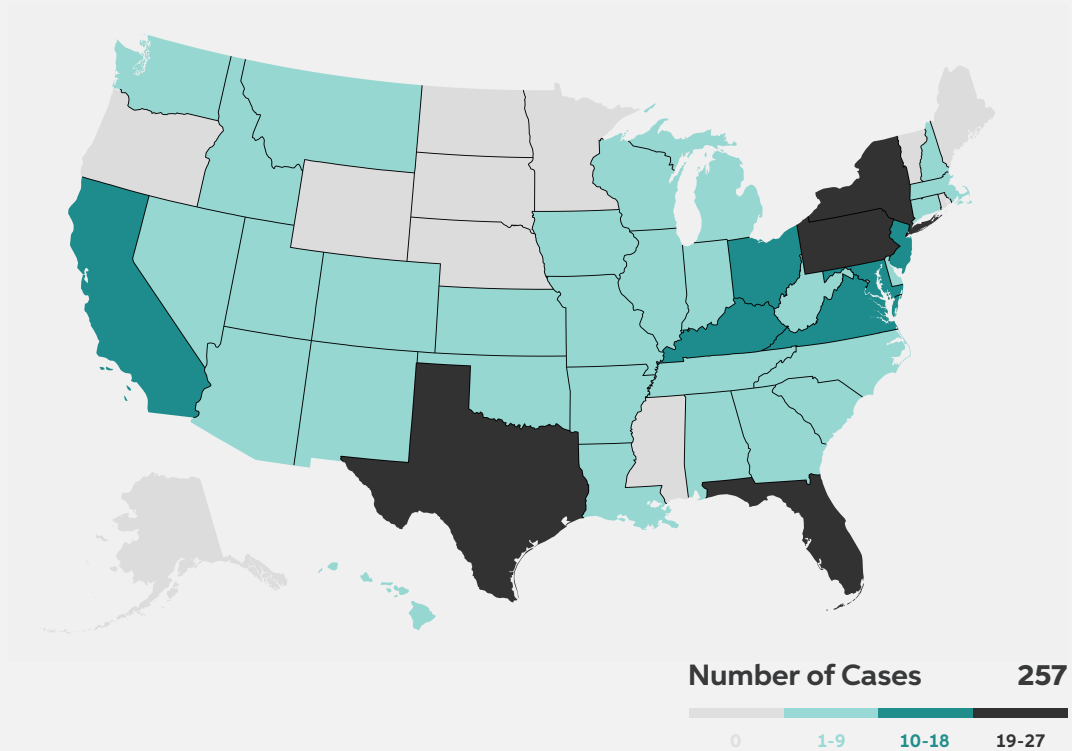
Taken together, these data show the heterogeneity of the mob that stormed the Capitol. Not only did alleged perpetrators come from a wide range of backgrounds, but the charges they now face — as well as the evidence used against them in criminal court — vary immensely. While these demographic data about individuals' legal cases are useful in sizing the general threat, they do not tell the full story of who stormed Capitol Hill on January 6th. To gain a better understanding of the different individuals who perpetrated the Capitol Hill siege, it is important to move beyond surface-level information and take a deeper look into the fractured landscape of domestic extremism in the United States.

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<sup>3</sup> The breakdown in numbers are rounded to the nearest percentage point, thus do not reflect 83% precisely.

<sup>4</sup> Some individuals' records included evidence from a combination of two or all three time periods.

### FIGURE 3 | Alleged Perpetrators' States of Residence



#### FIGURE 4 | Alleged Perpetrators' Counties of Residence

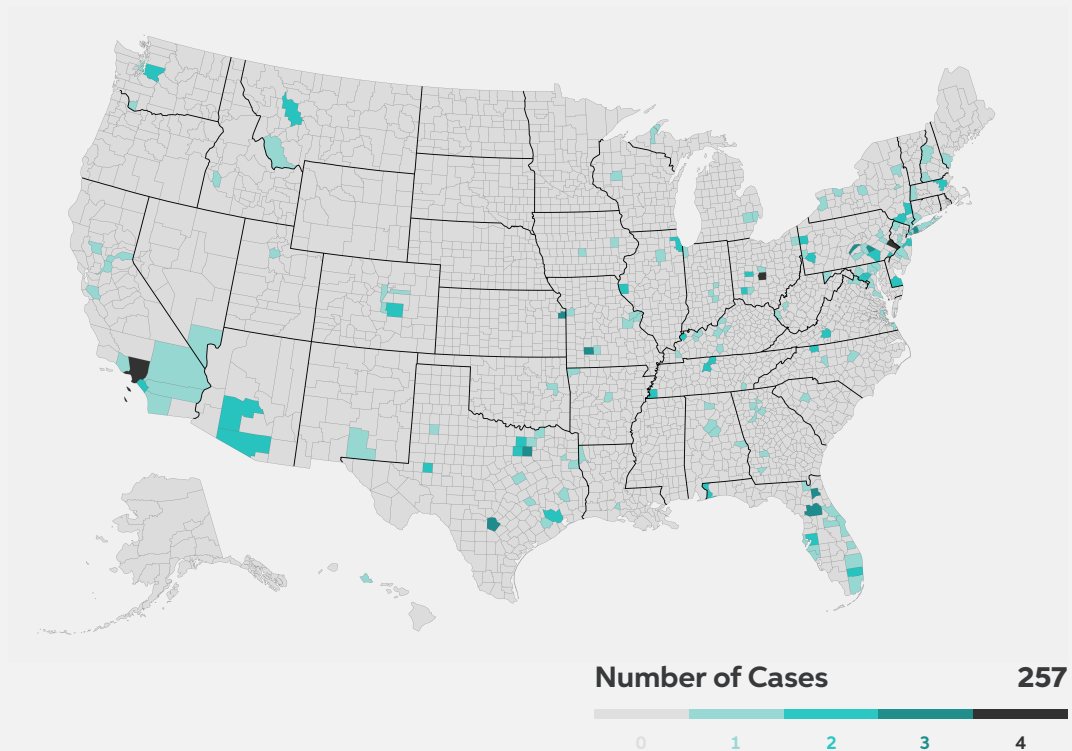
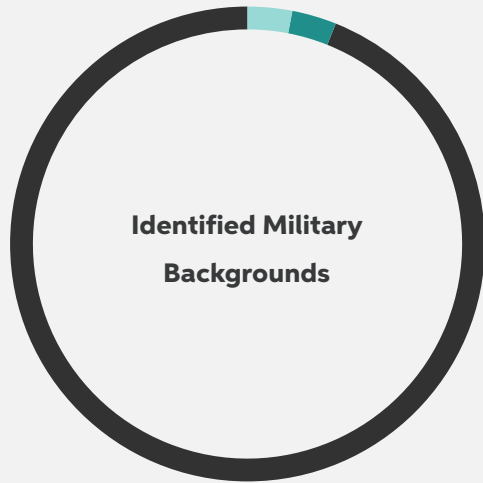


FIGURE 5

Reserves National Guard Veteran



Total 33



FIGURE 6

Three Percenters Proud Boys Oath Keepers



Total 12

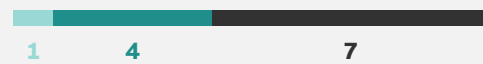


FIGURE 7

Both Others' Account Neither Personal Account



Total 257

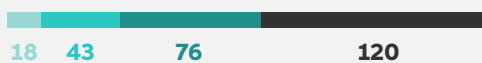
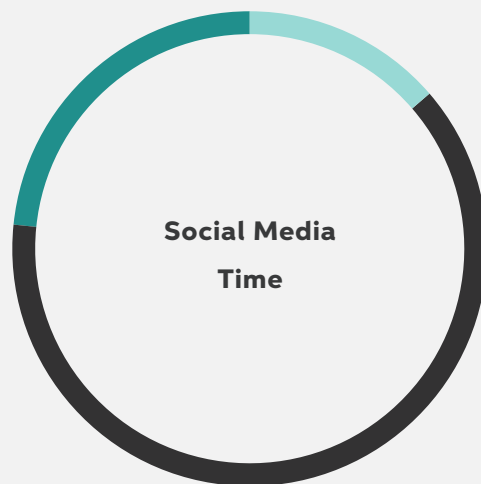
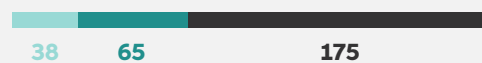


FIGURE 8

Before During After



Total 278





## CATEGORIZING THE CAPITOL HILL SIEGE PARTICIPANTS

Based on preliminary information, this report evaluates three main categories of individuals who stormed the Capitol: militant networks, organized clusters, and inspired believers. These categories are defined by individual participants' level of organization, connections to extremist networks, and prior planning for the siege.<sup>5</sup> As investigations and prosecutions continue, defining alleged participants by their level of organization and networked connections creates relatively stable categories for analysis that also help explain the complex domestic extremist landscape in the United States before and after the events of January 6, 2021. The specific cases included in each category may be liable to change as new information and new cases emerge, yet the categories themselves are relatively unlikely to change.

The first category — **militant networks** — represents the apex of organizational planning by domestic violent extremist groups for and on January 6th. Militant networks at the Capitol were characterized by hierarchical organization and chains of command. Leaders of established domestic violent extremist groups issued orders or directives to members of their groups, encouraging them to travel to Washington in advance of the siege. Individual group members answered the call, contacting one another to coordinate logistics, methods, and plans of action in the weeks before January 6th. Unlike individuals in the other categories, not only did these militant networks plan to attend protests on the 6th, but they are also alleged to have planned in advance to breach the Capitol and, in many cases, conduct violence inside the walls of the building.

The second category — **organized clusters** — are composed of small, close-knit groups of individuals who allegedly participated in the siege together, usually

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<sup>5</sup> Unlike many analyses of the siege, the report's categories for participants do not correlate with individual participation in violent acts at the Capitol or their specific ideological affiliation. Intuitively, assessing participants by their level of violence or preferred ideology may be a helpful method to understand what happened at the Capitol on January 6th, especially as more data are uncovered. However, because data at this stage are preliminary and generally incomplete, many categorizations that are dependent on ideology or activity rather than planning risk significant methodological error. For more organized participants, court documents and other open-source reporting lend insight into their ideological inspiration, but for many others they paint an incomplete picture of their motivations and/or extremist persuasion. At this stage, all activities (and especially violent activities) alleged in court documents have not been proven in a court of law, and federal law enforcement is yet to charge suspects involved in some of the more serious acts of violence perpetrated on the Capitol grounds that day. See: Benner, Katie. 2021. "Justice Dept. Confronts Increasingly Complex Capitol Riot Inquiry." The New York Times, February 19, 2021, sec. U.S. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/19/us/politics/capitol-riot-investigation.html>.

comprising family members, friends, and acquaintances. Inspired by ideological fervor, organized clusters lacked top-down direction from a domestic violent extremist organization but jointly coordinated their travel to DC in groups of like-minded believers. Many in organized clusters did not arrive in Washington with the same level of advanced planning to breach the Capitol or conduct violence as established militant networks.

Finally, the remainder of the alleged siege participants can be categorized as **inspired believers**. These individuals, according to available evidence, were neither participants in an established violent extremist group nor connected to any of the other individuals who are alleged to have stormed the Capitol. They arranged their own travel, accommodations, and other logistics to join the crowds in Washington from areas throughout the United States. Inspired by a range of extremist narratives, conspiracy theories, and personal motivations, individual believers made up a significant portion of the crowd at the Capitol.

**Table 1: Categorizing Siege Participants**



	Militant Networks	Organized Clusters	Inspired Believers
Organization (vertical)	Top-down directives from DVE organization leaders to participate in the siege	Inspired to participate in the siege despite lack of membership in formal DVE group	Inspired to participate in the siege despite lack of membership in formal DVE group
Networks (horizontal)	Networks of several members of DVE organization	Networks of several like-minded believers, especially groups of family/friends	No known network
Planning	Planned travel to DC and accommodations in conjunction with other participants; Planned to breach Capitol and conduct violence	Planned travel to DC and logistics with other participants	Planned own travel to DC and logistics

## **Militant Networks**

Federal law enforcement officials argue that individuals in this category were part of organized militant networks that, in the weeks before the siege, made plans to send their members from across the country to Washington, DC.<sup>6</sup> Individuals in militant networks not only made plans in conjunction with one another to travel to Washington and participate in the “Stop the Steal” protests on January 6th, but were tasked by the leaders of these networks to breach the Capitol and, in some cases, conduct violence.<sup>7</sup>

When the protests on January 6th escalated to violence, individuals in organized militant networks were often the tip of the spear, forcing their way past the U.S. Capitol Police barricades, assaulting police, smashing windows, and directing rioters to the offices of Members of Congress. Members of militant networks were visible in the video footage and other documented evidence from the siege, oftentimes seen donning tactical equipment and a variety of insignias and logos of armed groups. While on the ground, the groups used various means of communication, including military-style hand signals, walkie-talkies and digital two-way radios, and social media.<sup>8</sup>

While only representing a small fraction of the rioters present during the siege of the Capitol, understanding these militant networks should be the utmost priority for law enforcement at present. First, many individuals in these groups are alleged to be responsible for some of the most heinous crimes committed on January 6th. Their prosecution will likely require lengthy investigations involving serious federal charges, potentially including conspiracy, sedition, assault on federal officers, and even federal murder charges.<sup>9</sup> In addition, due to militant networks acting as the vanguard for the siege, these groups’ participation was likely a necessary

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<sup>6</sup> Program on Extremism interviews with law enforcement officials, January 2021.; Valentino-DeVries, Jennifer, Denise Lu, Eleanor Lutz, and Alex Leeds Matthews. 2021. “A Small Group of Militants’ Outsize Role in the Capitol Attack.” The New York Times, February 21, 2021, sec. U.S. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/02/21/us/capitol-riot-attack-militants.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Hsu, Spencer S., Tom Jackman, and Devlin Barrett. n.d. “Self-Styled Militia Members Planned on Storming the U.S. Capitol Days in Advance of Jan. 6 Attack, Court Documents Say.” Washington Post. Accessed February 21, 2021. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/legal-issues/conspiracy-oath-keeper-arrest-capitol-riot/2021/01/19/fb84877a-5a4f-11eb-8bcf-3877871c819d\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/legal-issues/conspiracy-oath-keeper-arrest-capitol-riot/2021/01/19/fb84877a-5a4f-11eb-8bcf-3877871c819d_story.html).

<sup>8</sup> Valentino-DeVries et. al., “A Small Group of Militants’ Outsize Role in the Capitol Attack.”

<sup>9</sup> Benner, “Justice Dept. Confronts Increasingly Complex Capitol Riot Inquiry.”

precondition for the escalation of violence from an angry riot into a breach of Capitol security.<sup>10</sup>

Most importantly, however, the groups that these individuals represent potentially pose the largest threat of enacting follow-on attacks in the future. Because some of the individuals arrested at the Capitol are representatives of organized armed groups in the United States, their presence at the siege is a potential harbinger of future violence conducted by their networks and affiliates. Several networked participants charged thus far—or the groups to which they claim allegiance—were alleged to have also planned subsequent breaches of state and local seats of government in the period after January 6th.<sup>11</sup> The high-profile prosecutions of these networked violent extremists will be an opportunity to delve into the web of organized militants in the U.S. and prevent the occurrence of future acts of violence.

To date, federal prosecutions have zeroed in on two militant networks that are alleged to have planned the siege well in advance of January 6, 2021. Charging documents claim that many of the more-organized individuals that participated in the siege were affiliated with nationwide anti-government militia movements, specifically the Oath Keepers and the Three Percenters. Both groups operate as umbrella organizations for dozens of militias throughout the country. Ideologically, both the Oath Keepers and Three Percenters promote “resistance” against the U.S. federal government, which they view as a tyrannical, illegitimate entity that encroaches on Americans’ Constitutional rights (particularly those related to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment).<sup>12</sup>

On January 4, 2021, the Oath Keepers website posted a lengthy call to arms, signed by its founder Stewart Rhodes titled “Call to Action: Oath Keepers Deploying to DC To Protect Events, Speakers and Attendees on Jan 5-6: Time to Stand!”<sup>13</sup> “It is CRITICAL that all patriots who can be in DC get to DC,” the Oath Keepers wrote, “to

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<sup>10</sup> Valentino-DeVries et. al., “A Small Group of Militants’ Outsize Role in the Capitol Attack.”

<sup>11</sup> Romero, Simon, Kathleen Gray, and Danielle Ivory. 2021. “States Brace for Armed Protests in Wake of U.S. Capitol Attack.” *The New York Times*, January 16, 2021, sec. U.S. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/15/us/capitol-protests.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Jackson, Sam. 2020. *Oath Keepers: Patriotism and the Edge of Violence in a Right-Wing Antigovernment Group*. New York: Columbia University Press.

<sup>13</sup> “Call to Action: Oath Keepers Deploying to DC To Protect Events, Speakers and Attendees on Jan 5-6: Time to Stand!” 2021. Oath Keepers, January 4, 2021. <https://oathkeepers.org/2021/01/oath-keepers-deploying-to-dc-to-protect-events-speakers-attendees-on-jan-5-6-time-to-stand/>.

stand tall in support of President Trump's fight to defeat the enemies foreign and domestic who are attempting a coup, through the massive vote fraud and related attacks on our Republic.”<sup>14</sup> The communique documented some of the Oath Keepers' operational planning for the events: “as we have done on all recent DC ops, we will also have armed and equipped [quick reaction force] teams on standby, outside DC, in the event of a worse case scenario...for every Oath Keeper you see, there at least two you don't see.”<sup>15</sup>

Indeed, the most prominent examples of organized militia members charged by the federal government for their participation in the Capitol siege to date are alleged Oath Keepers who responded to this call to action. On February 19, 2021, a superseding indictment in federal court charged **Thomas Caldwell, Donovan Crawl, Jessica Watkins, Sandra Parker, Bennie Parker, Graydon Young, Laura Steele, Kelly Meggs** and **Connie Meggs** as co-conspirators with violent entry and disorderly conduct, entering a restricted building, obstructing an official proceeding, destroying government property, and tampering with documents or proceedings.<sup>16</sup> At the time of writing, this indictment represents the largest conspiracy case in the DOJ's prosecutions of those involved in the Capitol siege.<sup>17</sup>

The FBI claims that the alleged co-conspirators are all affiliated with the Oath Keepers with varying degrees of leadership in regional chapters of the group. Caldwell, a 65-year-old from Berryville, VA, is described in the indictment as the main organizer of the group, coordinating activities between the various Oath Keeper chapters and other militia groups prior to the Capitol siege.<sup>18</sup> Crawl and Watkins, from Woodstock and Champaign, OH respectively, are both alleged to be members of the Ohio State Regular Militia, a local militia group operating in Ohio

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

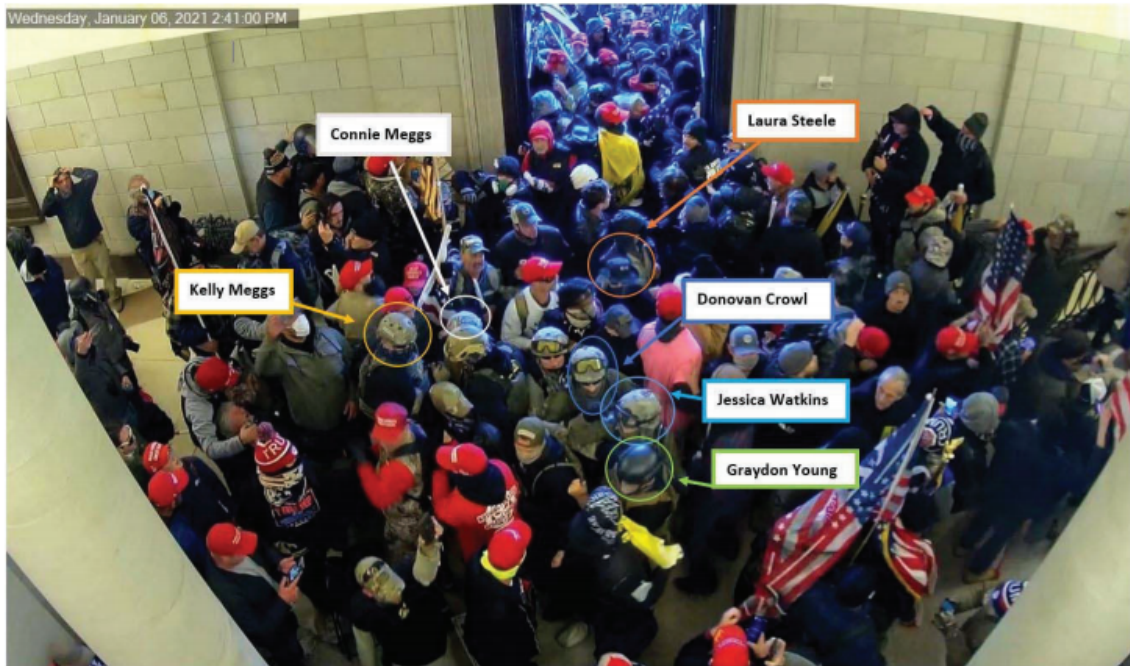
<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> “First Superseding Indictment.” 2021. *United States of America v. Thomas Caldwell, Donovan Crawl, Jessica Watkins, Sandra Parker, Bennie Parker, Graydon Young, Laura Steele, Kelly Meggs, and Connie Meggs*. United States District Court for the District of Columbia, February 19, 2021. Case: 21-cr-28-APM. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Caldwell%20et%20al%20First%20Superseding%20Indictment.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> “Six Individuals Affiliated with the Oath Keepers Indicted by a Federal Grand Jury for Conspiracy to Obstruct Congress on Jan. 6, 2021.” 2021. Department of Justice Press Release, February 19, 2021. <https://www.justice.gov/usao-dc/pr/six-individuals-affiliated-oath-keepers-indicted-federal-grand-jury-conspiracy-obstruct>.

<sup>18</sup> “First Superseding Indictment,” *United States of America v. Thomas Caldwell et al.*

that the FBI claims is a “dues-paying subset” of the Oath Keepers.<sup>19</sup> According to court documents, the Parkers were a retired couple interested in joining the Ohio State Regular Militia under Watkins’ command.<sup>20</sup> Days prior to the siege, siblings Graydon Young and Laura Steele allegedly both filed application and vetting forms to join a tactical unit of Florida Oath Keepers that the FBI believes was commanded by husband and wife Kelly and Connie Meggs.<sup>21</sup>



**Image 1:** Overhead view of a crowd in the entryway to the Capitol as taken by security footage. Individuals identified are Kelly and Connie Meggs, Laura Steele, Jessica Watkins, Donovan Crowl, and Graydon Young of the Oath Keepers.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> “Affidavit in Support of Criminal Complaint,” 2021. *United States of America v. Thomas Caldwell, Donovan Crowl, and Jessica Watkins*. United States District Court for the District of Columbia, January 19, 2021. Case: 1:21-mj-00119-ZMF. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Thomas%20Caldwell%20Donovan%20Crowl%20Jessica%20Watkins%20Affidavit%20in%20Support%20of%20Amended%20Criminal%20Complaint.pdf>.

<sup>20</sup> “Criminal Complaint,” 2021. *United States of America v. Sandra Ruth Parker and Bennie Alvin Parker*. United States District Court for the District of Columbia, February 18, 2021. Case: 1:21-mj-00161-KLL. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Sandra%20Parker%20and%20Bennie%20Parker%20Criminal%20Complaint.pdf>.

<sup>21</sup> “Criminal Complaint,” 2021. *United States of America v. Kelly Meggs, Connie Meggs, Graydon Young, and Laura Steele*. United States District Court for the District of Columbia, February 11, 2021. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Kelly%20Meggs%20Connie%20Meggs%20Graydon%20Young%20Laura%20Steele%20Criminal%20Complaint.pdf>.

<sup>22</sup> “Affidavit in Support of Criminal Complaint,” 2021. *United States of America v. Thomas Caldwell, Donovan Crowl, and Jessica Watkins*. United States District Court for the District of Columbia, January 19, 2021. Case: 1:21-mj-00119-ZMF. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Thomas%20Caldwell%20Donovan%20Crowl%20Jessica%20Watkins%20Affidavit%20in%20Support%20of%20Amended%20Criminal%20Complaint.pdf>.



The conspiracy charges against the defendants stem from conversations on social media between the nine individuals in the months before the siege. The FBI claims that Oath Keepers planned for the events of January 6th as early as November 9, 2020, when Watkins reportedly encouraged all Ohio State Regular Militia under her command to attend military training so they could be “fighting fit before innauguration [sic],” directing them to download the walkie-talkie app Zello for communications.<sup>23</sup> Caldwell reportedly contacted Watkins shortly thereafter, implying that they had personally met at Caldwell’s house in Virginia and that they would “meet again...we may have to fight.”<sup>24</sup>

Federal prosecutors argue that Caldwell and Watkins “[organized] a tactical unit of trained fighters that stormed and breached the Capitol,” including members of the Ohio State Regular Militia, the Florida Oath Keepers, and other unnamed chapters.<sup>25</sup> Rather than being “ancillary [players] who became swept up in the moment,” court documents allege that Watkins and Caldwell were “involved from beginning to end in minute details such as arranging hotels and transportation to more substantive plans such as weapons discussions and pre-strike reviews of the targeted area of operation.”<sup>26</sup>

Reports claim that, in the week before the raid, Caldwell was also allegedly attempting to drum up support for the Oath Keepers’ operation amongst other militia groups. He allegedly contacted several Three Percenters, attempting to assign them to the “Quick Response Team” or “Quick Reaction Force” (QRF) described in a January 4th call to action.<sup>27</sup> Caldwell’s conception of the QRF was a team of militia members stationed across the Potomac River, ready to ferry arms by boat to the team at the Capitol in the event of escalation.<sup>28</sup> Several of the defendants were reportedly aware of Caldwell’s plans, with Kelly Meggs telling an

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<sup>23</sup> Where possible, direct quotes from communications included as evidence in court documents are presented in their original format and phrasing without edits to spelling and grammar. “First Superseding Indictment,” *United States of America v. Thomas Caldwell et al.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> “Government’s Memorandum in Support of Pre-Trial Detention.” 2021. *United States of America v. Jessica Marie Watkins*. United States District Court for the District of Columbia, February 11, 2021. Case: 1:21-cr-00028-APM.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> “Affidavit in Support of Criminal Complaint,” *United States of America v. Thomas Caldwell, Donovan Crowl, and Jessica Watkins*.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

unnamed person online that he would not have to carry weapons to the Capitol because of a “heavy QRF 10min out,” and Watkins telling the Parkers that “we are not bringing firearms. QRF will be our Law Enforcement members of Oathkeepers.”<sup>29</sup>

On January 6th, the defendants allegedly entered the Capitol alongside a larger group of militia members, utilizing a military-style “stack” formation to clear police barriers and enter the building.<sup>30</sup> As the incursion was taking place, the FBI claims that the Oath Keepers used a range of operational communications tools. On Zello, a walkie-talkie application for mobile phones, Watkins created a channel called “Stop the Steal J6,” on which she and other members of a group of “30-40 people” communicated with one another during the siege.<sup>31</sup> Several defendants also alleged to have posted a number of videos of themselves inside the Capitol to the social media platform Parler.<sup>32</sup> Complementing new digital tools with older operational tradecraft, several militia members inside the Capitol were also using military-style hand signals to convey instructions.<sup>33</sup> However, perhaps the most concerning messages were allegedly sent by Crowl through Facebook Messenger to Caldwell as the incursion was taking place:

“All members are in the tunnels under capital seal them in . Turn on gas”; Tom take that bitch over”; “Tom all legislators are down in the Tunnels 3floors down”; “Do like we had to do when I was in the core start tearing oit florris go from top to bottom”; and “Go through back house chamber doors facing N left down hallway down steps.”<sup>34</sup>

The stream of contact between the nine co-defendants reportedly did not cease after the siege on the Capitol concluded. In the days following the siege, they exchanged a number of videos of themselves inside the Capitol.<sup>35</sup> However, as the FBI closed in on the defendants, Caldwell and Graydon Young are alleged to have deleted some of the social media content they used to broadcast their participation in the siege.<sup>36</sup> When Watkins and Crowl turned themselves in to the Urbana, OH

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<sup>29</sup> “First Superseding Indictment,” *United States of America v. Thomas Caldwell et al.*

<sup>30</sup> “Criminal Complaint,” *United States of America v. Kelly Meggs et al.*

<sup>31</sup> “First Superseding Indictment,” *United States of America v. Thomas Caldwell et al.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

police department on January 17, 2021, they told officers that they had been in Virginia since the 14th.<sup>37</sup> The FBI believes that they were indeed staying with Caldwell at his residence in Berryville, VA, based on communications between the trio and witness testimony.<sup>38</sup> Caldwell was arrested shortly after Crawl and Watkins in Virginia; Graydon Young, Laura Steele, the Meggs, and the Parkers were all arrested in mid-February.<sup>39</sup>

Beyond actors affiliated with the militia movement, the other militant network that is alleged to have pre-planned the siege at the Capitol are the Proud Boys. The Proud Boys are a nationwide network of self-described “Western male chauvinists” who utilize street assaults, violent counter-protests, and other methods in what they see as a defense of “Western civilization.”<sup>40</sup> To date, at least 20 individuals with connections to the Proud Boys and their local chapters throughout the country have been charged with participating in the events at the Capitol on January 6th.

The Proud Boys currently charged come from individual chapters in a dozen states, including Maryland, Florida, California, Hawaii, New York, Kansas, Missouri, Texas, Pennsylvania, Arizona, Washington, and Georgia. So far, most have been charged with individual-level offenses, but the Department of Justice is beginning to patch together superseding indictments of groups of Proud Boys who allegedly planned their participation in the siege together.<sup>41</sup> The number of conspiracy charges—alongside further evidence that Proud Boys affiliates planned their activities at the Capitol well in advance of January 6th—is likely to shape future prosecutions.

Much of the activity by Proud Boys networks at the Capitol stem from an earlier incident in Washington in the weeks before January 6th. On December 12, 2020, Proud Boys participated in a rally in Washington to protest the results of the 2020

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<sup>37</sup> “Government’s Memorandum in Support of Pre-Trial Detention.” *United States of America v. Jessica Marie Watkins*.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> “Six Individuals Affiliated with the Oath Keepers Indicted,” Department of Justice.

<sup>40</sup> Ailworth, Erin, and Rachel Levy. 2021. “Who Are the Proud Boys? Canada Names Far-Right Group a Terrorist Organization.” *Wall Street Journal*, February 5, 2021, sec. Politics. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/who-are-proud-boys-1160148575>; Kitts, Margo. 2020. “Proud Boys, Nationalism, and Religion.” *Journal of Religion and Violence*, October. <https://doi.org/10.5840/jrv2020102778>.

<sup>41</sup> Feuer, Alan. 2021. “Proud Boys Charged With Conspiracy in Capitol Riot.” *The New York Times*, January 30, 2021, sec. New York. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/29/nyregion/proud-boys-charged-with-conspiracy-in-capitol-riot.html>.

Presidential election, which they referred to as the “Million MAGA March.”<sup>42</sup> This event quickly descended into violence between Proud Boys and counter-protestors, in which four people were stabbed and one was shot.<sup>43</sup> During the commission of the riot, a group of Proud Boys led by the group’s chairman **Enrique Tarrio** burned a Black Lives Matter banner stolen from a local church. In the aftermath, Tarrio was arrested and banned from entering Washington, DC.<sup>44</sup>

Evidence from the criminal complaint of **Ethan Nordean** (a.k.a. Rufio Panman), the “Sergeant of Arms” of the Seattle Proud Boys chapter, claims that Tarrio and other Proud Boys leaders planned to involve their personnel at the siege on the Capitol to retaliate for Tarrio’s arrest.<sup>45</sup> As early as December 27, Nordean exhorted his followers on Parler to donate “safety/protective gear” and communications for an upcoming operation.<sup>46</sup> Just days before the siege, several Proud Boys leaders including Tarrio and Nordean encouraged the group’s members to be present in Washington, DC for the assault on the Capitol.<sup>47</sup> However, they encouraged the group’s followers to avoid wearing Proud Boys-branded apparel, display Proud Boys insignias, or even wear the black-and-yellow garb associated with the Proud Boys. Their aim was to “go incognito” during the Capitol siege, in a dual attempt to disguise themselves as agents provocateurs to blame Antifa for violence and prevent their interdiction by law enforcement.<sup>48</sup>

A number of Proud Boys allegedly answered this call and were present during the siege of the Capitol. Despite leaders’ calls to remain camouflaged, several prominent Proud Boys including Nordean and Florida Proud Boys organizer and

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<sup>42</sup> Slotkin, Jason, Suzanne Nuyen, and James Doubek. 2020. “4 Stabbed, 33 Arrested After Trump Supporters, Counterprotesters Clash In D.C.” NPR.Org. December 12, 2020. <https://www.npr.org/2020/12/12/945825924/trump-supporters-arrive-in-washington-once-again-for-a-million-maga-march>.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Hermann, Peter, and Martin Weil. 2021. “Proud Boys Leader Arrested in the Burning of Church’s Black Lives Matter Banner, D.C. Police Say.” Washington Post, January 4, 2021. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/public-safety/proud-boys-enrique-tarrio-arrest/2021/01/04/8642a76a-4edf-11eb-b96e-0e54447b23a1\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/public-safety/proud-boys-enrique-tarrio-arrest/2021/01/04/8642a76a-4edf-11eb-b96e-0e54447b23a1_story.html).

<sup>45</sup> “Criminal Complaint and Affidavit.” 2021. *United States of America v. Ethan Nordean*. United States District Court for the District of Columbia, February 2, 2021. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Ethan%20Nordean%20Complaint%20and%20Affidavit.pdf>

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

activist **Joseph Biggs** were identified at the Capitol and charged individually with federal offenses.<sup>49</sup> To date, several Proud Boys were also alleged to have participated in a broader conspiracy to storm the Capitol. New York Proud Boys **Dominic Pezzola** (a.k.a. “Spaz”) and **William Pepe** were indicted by a grand jury on conspiracy charges in addition to assaulting, resisting and impeding officers, civil disorder, destruction of government property, obstruction of an official proceeding, and illegally entering and engaging in disorderly conduct and physical violence in a restricted building.<sup>50</sup> According to the indictment, Pezzola, Pepe, and other members of the Proud Boys “traveled...to Washington, DC from different locations and arranged to meet in Washington.”<sup>51</sup> During the siege, Pezzola and Pepe used a wooden plank and a riot control shield to smash a Capitol window, assisting the crowd of rioters in entering the building.<sup>52</sup>

In early February, the leader of Hawaii’s Proud Boys chapter **Nicholas Ochs** and Texas Proud Boy **Nicholas DeCarlo** were charged in a superseding indictment with conspiracy to obstruct a government proceeding, destroying government property, theft of government property, entering a restricted building, and aiding and abetting.<sup>53</sup> The indictment claims that prior to the siege, Ochs and DeCarlo used the internet to fundraise for their travel to Washington from Hawaii and Texas to participate in the storming of the Capitol, and further conspired to “[travel] throughout and [occupy] the Capitol building after the Capitol had been breached.”<sup>54</sup> While inside, DeCarlo and Ochs reportedly inscribed “Murder the Media” on the Memorial Door of the Capitol and stole a pair of handcuffs from U.S. Capitol Police.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*; “Affidavit in Support of Criminal Complaint.” 2021. *United States of America v. Joseph Biggs*. United States District Court for the District of Columbia, January 19, 2021. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Joseph%20Randall%20Biggs%20Affidavit%20in%20Support%20of%20Criminal%20Complaint.pdf>

<sup>50</sup> “Indictment.” 2021. *United States of America v. Dominic Pezzola and William Pepe*. United States District Court for the District of Columbia, January 29, 2021. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Dominic%20Pezzola%20and%20William%20Pepe%20Indictment.pdf>.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

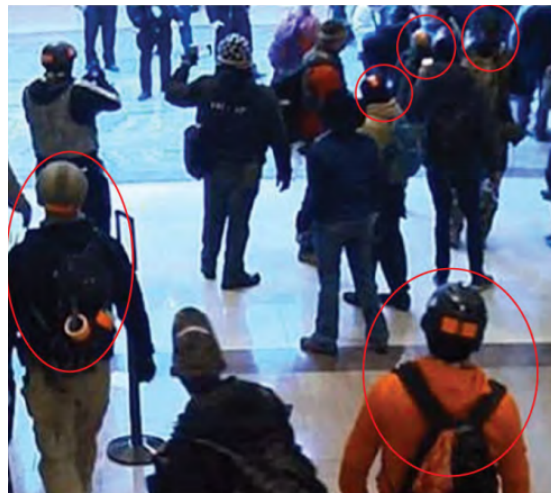
<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> “Indictment.” 2021. *United States of America v. Nicholas DeCarlo and Nicholas Ochs*. United States District Court for the District of Columbia, February 3, 2021. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Nicholas%20DeCarlo%20Indictment.pdf>

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

Finally, in the largest conspiracy case brought against the Proud Boys to date, **Ryan Ashlock, William Chrestman, Christopher Kuehne, Louis Enrique Colon, Felicia Konold** and **Cory Konold** were each charged with conspiracy, civil disorder, obstructing an official proceeding, threatening to assault a federal officer, entering a restricted building, and disorderly conduct on Capitol grounds.<sup>56</sup> The alleged co-conspirators are Proud Boys affiliates from the Kansas City, KS, Kansas City, MO, and Tulsa, AZ areas respectively. The Department of Justice argues that all defendants were present during a march led by Proud Boys prior to the breach of the Capitol, alongside other Proud Boys indicted for their participation in the siege (including Nordean, Biggs, and Pepe).<sup>57</sup> During the storming of the Capitol, members of this group were all seen wearing similar items of clothing, most notably a stripe of orange tape on tactical helmets that the DOJ claims Proud Boys members used to identify each other during the siege.<sup>58</sup>



**Image 2:** A photo of the purported Proud Boys in the Capitol who wore identifying orange stripes of tape on their helmets and clothing.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> "Affidavit in Support of Criminal Complaint and Arrest Warrant." 2021. *United States of America v. Christopher Kuehne, Louis Enrique Colon, Felicia Konold, and Cory Konold*. United States District Court for the District of Columbia, February 10, 2021. Case: 1:21-mj-00218. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Colon%20Kuehne%20F%20Konold%20C%20Konold%20Criminal%20Complaint.pdf>; "Affidavit in Support of Criminal Complaint and Arrest Warrant." 2021. *United States of America v. Ryan Ashlock*, United States District Court for the District of Columbia, February 18, 2021. Case: 1:21-mj-00241-GMH. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Ryan%20Ashlock%20Criminal%20Complaint.pdf>

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> "Affidavit in Support of Criminal Complaint and Arrest Warrant." 2021. *United States of America v. William Chrestman*, United States District Court for the District of Columbia, February 10, 2021. Case: 1:21-mj-00218. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/William%20Chrestman%20Criminal%20Complaint.pdf>



## Organized Clusters

The second category of perpetrators who stormed the Capitol on January 6th were individuals in small organized clusters who participated in the events with—and were later charged alongside—a number of their close personal contacts. Inspired by mutual interests in conspiracy theories and/or extremist ideologies, these individuals made their plans for the Capitol in conjunction with small clusters of like-minded believers. Especially prominent in this category are groups of family members and friends who are alleged to have entered the Capitol building together.

Unlike their counterparts in militant networks, members of organized clusters are not known to hold formal membership in established domestic violent extremist groups. Some had tangible connections to American extreme right-wing activist milieus, but their participation in the Capitol siege can be generally viewed as part of their broader ideological inspirations rather than a response to a direct call to arms by a specific domestic violent extremist group or leader. In contrast to inspired believers, organized clusters devised a plan amongst a small group of family members, friends, and acquaintances to travel to Washington and participate in the events at the Capitol.

From an analytical standpoint, this category is important as it may serve as a bridge to connecting participation in the Capitol siege to other studies on the nature of radicalization and mobilization to violent extremism, particularly within the United States. Research on the radicalization process of individuals has often emphasized the importance of family and friend groups in the radicalization process, arguing that a tight-knit network of close personal contacts can help solidify adoption of extremist ideology.<sup>60</sup> A further body of research argues that family and friend networks are conducive for mobilization to violent extremism, as networks of close

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<sup>60</sup> For example: Sikkens, Elga, M. R. P. J. R. S. van San, S. M. A. Sieckelinck, and Micha de Winter. "Parental Influence on Radicalization and De-radicalization according to the Lived Experiences of Former Extremists and their Families." *Journal for Deradicalization* 12 (2017): 192-226.; Scremin, Nicolò. "Family Matters: A Preliminary Framework for Understanding Family Influence on Islamist Radicalization." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2020): 1-17.; Randy Borum (2011) "Radicalization into Violent Extremism I: A Review of Social Science Theories." *Journal of Strategic Security* 4 (4): 7-36. <http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/jss/vol4/iss4/2/>; Borum, Randy (2011) "Radicalization into Violent Extremism II: A Review of Conceptual Models and Research." *Journal of Strategic Security* 4 (4): 37-62. <http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/jss/vol4/iss4/3/>; Meleagrou-Hitchens, Alexander, Audrey Alexander, and Nick Kaderbhai. "The impact of digital communications technology on radicalization and recruitment." *International Affairs* 93, no. 5 (2017): 1233-1249.; Sageman, Marc. *Understanding terror networks*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.

personal contacts can act as a starting point for planning, networking, and access to resources necessary to conduct violent extremist activity.<sup>61</sup> While at this stage, data about the radicalization and mobilization processes of the participants in the Capitol siege are sparse, the organized cluster category could be useful in connecting the events to other networks of American violent extremists past and future.

The organized clusters alleged to have participated in the Capitol siege were generally arranged as groups of family members or friends. To date, federal prosecutors have filed several charges against members of the same family who traveled to Washington and were charged for participation in the siege, including some of the most highly-visible perpetrators. **Kevin Seefried**, a Laurel, Delaware man who reportedly brought a Confederate battle flag into the Capitol, was charged alongside his son **Hunter Seefried** for breaching the Capitol on January 6th.<sup>62</sup> Both Seefrieds were charged with illegally entering the Capitol and disorderly conduct. Hunter was additionally charged with physical violence inside the Capitol and destruction of government property for allegedly breaking a window and Kevin with illegally parading in front of the Capitol building with the Confederate flag.<sup>63</sup> According to the criminal complaint, the Seefrieds told the FBI in a voluntary interview that they initially made plans to travel to Washington DC to hear then President Trump speak, and later participated in a march alongside a large group from the White House grounds to the Capitol.<sup>64</sup> A coworker of Hunter Seefried's also told investigators that after the siege, he bragged about participating in the events alongside his father.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Dalgaard-Nielsen, Anja. 2010. "Violent Radicalization in Europe: What We Know and What We Do Not Know." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 33 (9): 797–814. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2010.501423>; Hafez, Mohammed, and Creighton Mullins. 2015. "The Radicalization Puzzle: A Theoretical Synthesis of Empirical Approaches to Homegrown Extremism." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 38 (11): 958–75. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2015.1051375>; Holman, Timothy. 2016. "'Gonna Get Myself Connected': The Role of Facilitation in Foreign Fighter Mobilizations." *Perspectives on Terrorism* 10 (2). <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/497>; Neumann, Peter, and Brooke Rogers. 2007. "Recruitment and Mobilisation for the Islamist Militant Movement in Europe." London, UK: International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation. [icsr.info/2008/10/recruitment-and-mobilisation-for-the-islamist-militant-movement-in-europe](https://icsr.info/2008/10/recruitment-and-mobilisation-for-the-islamist-militant-movement-in-europe).

<sup>62</sup> "Statement of Facts." 2021. *United States of America v. Hunter Seefried and Kevin Seefried*. United States District Court for the District of Columbia, January 13, 2021. Case: 1:21-mj-00046. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Kevin%20and%20Hunter%20Seefried%20Statement%20of%20Facts.pdf>

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

The Seefrieds were not the only prominent parent-child pair charged for participating in the Capitol siege. **Eric Gavelek Munchel**—the Tennessee man whose law enforcement claims is depicted in a photograph from the Senate Chambers carrying zip-tie handcuffs—was indicted alongside his mother, **Lisa Eisenhart**.<sup>66</sup> Munchel and Eisenhart are charged as co-conspirators with civil disorder, entering a restricted building, and disorderly conduct.<sup>67</sup> Prosecutors claim that Eisenhart rented a DC hotel room two days before the siege for herself and her son; photographic evidence in the indictment depicts Munchel and Eisenhart leaving the hotel together just prior to the siege, outside the Capitol grounds together, and at the same hotel following the siege.<sup>68</sup> Both also gave interviews to *The Times* after January 6th, in which Munchel claims that their participation in the events was “to show that we’re willing to rise up, band together and fight if necessary. Same as our forefathers, who established this country in 1776. It was a kind of flexing of muscles.”<sup>69</sup> Eisenhart told the interviewers that she would “rather die as a 57-year-old woman than live under oppression. I’d rather die and would rather fight.”<sup>70</sup>

Organized clusters of family members reportedly present at the Capitol extend beyond parents and children, including a number of other types of familial ties. Husband and wife **Jason** and **Christina Gerding**, from Quincy, Illinois, were jointly charged in late January for participating in the Capitol siege, as were **Christopher** and **Virginia Marie “Jenny” Spencer** from Pilot Mountain, North Carolina.<sup>71</sup> Several cases involve siblings, including East Helena, Montana brothers **Jerod** and **Joshua**

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<sup>66</sup> “Affidavit in Support of Criminal Complaint and Arrest Warrant.” 2021. *United States of America v. Lisa Marie Eisenhart and Eric Gavelek Munchel*. United States District Court for the District of Columbia, January 15, 2021. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Eric%20Gavelek%20Munchel%20%26%20Lisa%20Marie%20Eisenhart%20Affidavit%20in%20Support%20of%20Criminal%20Complaint.pdf>

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> Washington, Laura Pullman. 2021. “Trump’s Militias Say They Are Armed and Ready to Defend Their Freedoms,” January 10, 2021, sec. world. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/trumps-militias-say-they-are-armed-and-ready-to-defend-their-freedoms-8ht5m0j70>.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> “Criminal Complaint.” 2021. *United States of America v. Christina Gerding and Jason Gerding*. United States District Court for the District of Columbia, January 19, 2021. Case: 1:21-mj-00148. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Christina%20Gerding%20Complaint%20and%20Affidavit.pdf>; “Statement of Facts.” 2021. *United States of America v. Christopher Spencer and Virginia Marie Spencer*, United States District Court for the District of Columbia, February 5, 2021. Case: 1:21-mj-00205-GMH. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Jenny%20Spencer%20Statement%20of%20Facts.pdf>

**Hughes.**<sup>72</sup> The Department of Justice also charged a pair of cousins—**Robert Bauer** from Cave City, Kentucky and **Edward Hemenway** of Winchester, Virginia—for entering the Capitol building together during the siege.<sup>73</sup>

In addition to family groups, other clusters were organized among groups of friends, coworkers, and acquaintances. Individual friendship-based organized clusters vary by both the method by which the individuals involved are reported to have met one another, as well as by how long the individuals were friends for prior to the siege. On one end of the spectrum, individuals in organized clusters became acquaintances specifically for the purpose of planning their travel to the Capitol together. These cases are important because they document the use of digital communications technologies—particularly social media—in connecting like-minded believers and serving as a coordinating mechanism for participation.

One particularly illuminating example of this phenomenon is the group from the Dallas, Texas metropolitan area that referred to itself as the “Patriot Flight.”<sup>74</sup> On January 5, 2021, Texan realtor **Jason Lee Hyland** is alleged to have texted several individuals whom he reportedly met on a social media page about a private flight leaving from Denton Enterprise Airport. “Thanks for joining me to DC to stand up for America. This will be historic – no matter the outcome.”<sup>75</sup> The flight left Denton at 3:00PM on the 5th and arrived at Manassas Regional Airport outside Washington later that night, carrying Hyland, **Jennifer “Jenna” Ryan**, **Katherine “Katie” Schwab**, and two unnamed individuals.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> “Statement of Facts.” 2021. *United States of America v. Joshua Calvin Hughes and Jerod Wade Hughes*. United States District Court for the District of Columbia, January 28, 2021. Case: 1:21-mj-00180-ZMF. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Joshua%20Calvin%20Hughes%20and%20Jerod%20Wade%20Hughes%20Statement%20of%20Facts.pdf>

<sup>73</sup> Bauer also is alleged to have participated in the events with his wife, who has not been charged. “Statement of Facts.” 2021. *United States of America v. Robert Bauer and Edward Hemenway*. United States District Court for the District of Columbia, January 14, 2021. Case: 1:21-mj-00059-ZMF. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Robert%20Bauer%20and%20Edward%20Hemenway%20Criminal%20Complaint%20and%20Statement%20of%20Facts.pdf>

<sup>74</sup> “Statement of Facts.” 2021. *United States of America v. Jason Lee Hyland*. United States District Court for the District of Columbia, January 28, 2021. Case: 1:21-mj-00181. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Jason%20Lee%20Hyland%20Criminal%20Complaint.pdf>

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*



*Image 3: A group of individuals - purported to be Jason Lee Hyland, Jenna Ryan, Katherine Schwab, and two unnamed individuals - who are alleged to have traveled via private plane to DC. See reference 74.*



*Image 4: A photo from Jenna Ryan's Twitter showing her in front of a window at the Capitol, with the caption "Window at The capitol. And if the news doesn't stop lying about us we're going to come after their studios next..." See reference 77.*

The next day, Ryan unleashed a barrage of online videos on her eponymous account. "We're gonna go down and storm the Capitol," she bragged in a video posted the morning of January 6th, "they're down there right now and that's why we came and so that's what we are going to do. So wish me luck."<sup>77</sup> A few hours later, Ryan, Hyland, and Schwab all reportedly appeared in a 21-minute social media video taken inside the Capitol building by Ryan at the time of the siege.<sup>78</sup> After the siege, the Patriot Flight group reportedly continued to highlight their own participation in the events on social media. Schwab told another online user that she had gotten "a little further" inside the Capitol building and Ryan, posting on Twitter, claimed that "We just stormed the Capital. It was one of the best days of my life."<sup>79</sup> To corroborate this, Ryan posted a picture of herself on Twitter in front of a broken Capitol window, remarking that "if the news doesn't stop lying about us we're going to come after their studios next."<sup>80</sup>

<sup>77</sup> "Statement of Facts." 2021. *United States of America v. Jennifer Leigh Ryan*. United States District Court for the District of Columbia, January 15, 2021. Case: 1:21-mj-00062. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Jennifer%20Ryan%20Statement%20of%20Facts.pdf>.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*; "Statement of Facts." 2021. *United States of America v. Katherine Staveley Schwab*. United States District Court for the District of Columbia, January 28, 2021. Case: 1:21-mj-00179. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Katherine%20Staveley%20Schwab%20Criminal%20Complaint.pdf>.

<sup>80</sup> "Statement of Facts," *United States of America v. Jennifer Leigh Ryan*.

Hyland, Ryan and Schwab were each charged with unlawfully entering restricted grounds and disorderly conduct.<sup>81</sup> FBI agents interviewed Schwab on January 15, 2021 at her home in Texas; Hyland was interviewed shortly thereafter. Schwab claimed in an interview that in total, five people were on the private flight from Denton to Manassas the day before the siege.<sup>82</sup> She reportedly told investigators that she had a prior personal relationship with Hyland, but that the flight was the first time that she met Ryan or either of the two unnamed travelers in person.<sup>83</sup> Ryan and the unnamed travelers apparently connected with the cluster through Hyland, who told several contacts on social media that he was planning on arranging a flight to DC to participate in protests on the 6th and encouraged others to “check in” to the protests on a website.<sup>84</sup>

In contrast to the Patriot Flight, other friendship-based organized clusters were established through longstanding connections that date back years before the siege. In some cases, organized clusters for the siege initially developed through other forms of nonviolent far-right activist groups. They mirror the use of non-violent extremist activism as a springboard for other types of coordinated, violent extremist activity in other ideological and geographic contexts.<sup>85</sup> The role of social media as a basis for organization is less present in publicly available evidence about these cases; instead, the focus is more heavily on personal connections and joint organizing experience as a basis for the network.

**Suzanne Ianni and Mark Sahady** were known right-wing activists in the greater Boston area, responsible mainly for planning anti-LGBTQ events in Boston. In their respective, self-proclaimed leadership roles in the organization “Super Happy Fun America,” Sahady and Ianni organized and were involved in a number of protest

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<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*; “Statement of Facts,” *United States of America v. Jason Lee Hyland*; “Statement of Facts,” *United States of America v. Katherine Staveley Schwab*.

<sup>82</sup> “Statement of Facts,” *United States of America v. Katherine Staveley Schwab*.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> See for instance, the development of Salafi-jihadist street activist networks in Western Europe as a precursor to ISIS recruitment networks. Vidino, Lorenzo. 2015. “Sharia4: From Confrontational Activism to Militancy.” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 9 (2). <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/415>; Van Ostaeyen, Pieter. 2016. “Belgian Radical Networks and the Road to the Brussels Attacks.” *CTC Sentinel* 9 (6). <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/belgian-radical-networks-and-the-road-to-the-brussels-attacks>; Lia, Brynjar, and Petter Nesser. 2016. “Jihadism in Norway: A Typology of Militant Networks in a Peripheral European Country.” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 10 (6). <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/563>.





*Image 5: A photo from the group's Twitter account, showing individuals on a bus with the caption, "Bus 1 of 11 coming to Washington DC. See you there!" See reference 89.*

and rally events, including a 2019 "Straight Pride Parade" in Boston and a summer 2020 protest against Massachusetts COVID-19 restrictions.<sup>86</sup> In organizing these events, they often connected with activists from across the spectrum of the far-right movement in New England and beyond. Sahady, for instance, was also affiliated with the Boston-based group Resist Marxism, led by ex-Proud Boy and ardent white nationalist Kyle Chapman (a.k.a. Based Stickman).<sup>87</sup> One outlet described Super Happy Fun America as a front for Resist Marxism.<sup>88</sup>

Federal prosecutors claim that Ianni and Sahady used their organizing experience to coordinate group travel for far-right activists in New England to DC for the protests at the

Capitol. In an interview for a local media outlet prior to the siege, Ianni claimed to have booked 11 buses to transport Super Happy Fun America affiliates from Massachusetts to Washington on January 5, 2021.<sup>89</sup> A picture posted to the group's official Twitter depicts Ianni, Sahady, and several others (including one individual wearing a Proud Boys shirt) traveling to DC on one of the buses.<sup>90</sup> After photographic evidence reportedly depicted Sahady and Ianni inside the Capitol building on January 6th, federal prosecutors charged them separately with unlawfully entering the Capitol and engaging in disorderly conduct on Capitol grounds.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>86</sup> Crimaldi, Laura, and Zoe Greenberg. 2021. "Super Happy Fun America Always Claimed to Be Kidding. But Their History Suggests Otherwise." *The Boston Globe*. February 20, 2021. <https://apps.bostonglobe.com/metro/politics/2021/02/super-happy-fun-america>.

<sup>87</sup> Sommer, Will. 2019. "Far-Right Groups Embrace 'Straight Pride Parades' to Win Recruits, Media Attention." *The Daily Beast*, July 25, 2019, sec. politics. <https://www.thedailybeast.com/far-right-groups-embrace-straight-pride-parades-to-win-recruits-media-attention>.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> "Statement of Facts." 2021. *United States of America v. Suzanne Ianni*. United States District Court for the District of Columbia, January 19, 2021. Case: 1:21-mj-07004-JCB. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Suzanne%20Ianni%20Statement%20of%20Facts.pdf>.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*; "Statement of Facts." 2021. *United States of America v. Mark Sahady*. United States District Court for the District of Columbia, January 19, 2021. Case: 1:21-mj-07005-JCB. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Mark%20Sahady%20Statement%20of%20Facts.pdf>.



## ***Inspired Believers***

The third category of cases analyzed in this report details those who traveled to the U.S. Capitol and engaged in alleged criminal activity without involvement in any known network. Many of the individuals responsible for storming the Capitol were brazen opportunists who took advantage of the unrest to enter the building and achieve personal or political objectives, despite lacking a well-devised plan to do so in advance. At present, there is no evidence to suggest that these inspired believers had the hierarchical organization or chains of command of the first category, nor that they engaged in the organized travel to the U.S. Capitol representative of the second.

Inspired believers run the gamut in terms of known ideological motivation, social media usage, and alleged actions at the U.S. Capitol on January 6th. This diverse group of individuals includes those who have expressed support for anti-government ideologies and movements, as well as adherents of the QAnon conspiracy theory. Finally, it includes those seemingly present at the Capitol to ‘Stop the Steal’, i.e. stop the certification of electoral votes in the 2020 Presidential election. The hodgepodge of individuals in this category, with varied and often conflicting ideologies, evidences the diverse and fractured domestic violent extremist threat present in the United States today.<sup>92</sup> Importantly, it is also a reminder of the lone actor terrorism threat posed by domestic violent extremists - a threat which may be inspired by the events of January 6th.<sup>93</sup>

The first category in this report details those who were affiliated with organized violent extremist groups and, in conjunction with other group members, collectively planned their travel to Washington with the specific intent of breaching the Capitol. Further down the spectrum of affiliation, some individuals who, despite a lack of evidence to date to establish that they were formal members of an organized

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<sup>92</sup> Hughes, Seamus and Deborah Margolin. “The Fractured Terrorism Threat to America.” Lawfare. November 10, 2019. <https://www.lawfareblog.com/fractured-terrorism-threat-america>; Hoffman, Bruce and Jacob Ware. “The Terrorist Threat from the Fractured Far Right.” Lawfare. November 1, 2020. <https://www.lawfareblog.com/terrorist-threat-fractured-far-right>; Jones, Seth G, Catrina Doxsee, Nicholas Harrington, Grace Hwang, and James Suber. “The War Comes Home: The Evolution of Domestic Terrorism in the United States.” Washington, D.C. Center for Strategic and International Studies. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/war-comes-home-evolution-domestic-terrorism-united-states>.

<sup>93</sup> MacFarquhar, Neal, Jack Healy, Mike Baker and Serge F. Kovaleski. 2021. “Capitol Attack Could Fuel Extremist Recruitment For Years, Experts Warn.” The New York Times. January 16, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/16/us/capitol-attack-extremist-hate-groups.html>.

violent extremist group, nevertheless displayed an affinity for these groups' ideologies.

Court documents claim that some of the individuals charged thus far were inspired believers of the anti-government militia movement. **Larry Rendall Brock**, a retired Air Force lieutenant colonel who allegedly entered the Capitol wearing a military helmet and vest carrying zipties, was charged with violent entry and disorderly conduct and entering a restricted building after his ex-wife recognized him from a photo of the siege.<sup>94</sup> Posts on Brock's social media in the weeks prior to the siege, used by the government to argue in favor of pre-trial detention, arguably demonstrate his sympathy for militia groups. "We are now under occupation by a hostile governing force," Brock commented on December 31, 2020, "that may seem ludicrous to some, but I see no distinction between a group of Americans seizing power and governing with complete disregard to the Constitution and an invading force...Against all enemies foreign and domestic #OathKeeper #2A #III%."95

Some individual believers charged for their role in the siege were reportedly influenced by other domestic violent extremist ideologies, including those related to racially and ethnically motivated violent extremism (RMVE). Four days after the siege, federal prosecutors charged **Robert Keith Packer** of Newport News, Virginia with unlawfully entering the Capitol and disorderly conduct.<sup>96</sup> The FBI claims it identified Packer by a now-notorious sweatshirt that he allegedly wore to the siege, depicting a skull-and-crossbones with the text "Camp Auschwitz- Work Brings Freedom" on it, in what it called "a symbol of Nazi hate ideology."<sup>97</sup> A cooperating witness reportedly informed the FBI that they saw a person matching Packer's description wearing the same hoodie inside a Newport News convenience store.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> "Affidavit in Support of Criminal Complaint." 2021. *United States of America v. Larry Rendall Brock*. United States District Court for the District of Columbia, January 9, 2021. 4:21-MJ-017-BJ. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Larry%20Rendall%20Brock%20Affidavit%20in%20Support%20of%20Criminal%20Complaint.pdf>.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> "Affidavit in Support of Criminal Complaint and Arrest Warrant." 2021. *United States of America v. Robert Keith Packer*. United States District Court for the District of Columbia, January 12, 2021. Case: 2:21-mj-00021-DEM. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Robert%20Packer%20Criminal%20Complaint.pdf>.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

The events at the Capitol on January 6th also evidence the reach of the QAnon conspiracy theory.<sup>99</sup> In May 2019, the FBI's Phoenix Field Office released an internal intelligence bulletin assessing that QAnon, along with other "anti-government, identity based, and fringe political conspiracy theories" was "very highly likely" to motivate domestic extremists.<sup>100</sup> A criminal complaint described it as "a sprawling, discredited, anti-establishment conspiracy theory...central to the QAnon conspiracy theory is the false belief that the world is run by a cabal of Satan-worshipping pedophiles and child traffickers."<sup>101</sup> The affiant further notes that, following the November 3, 2020 election, many QAnon adherents "began pushing false and discredited theories of massive voter fraud and that the 2020 election had been 'stolen' from President Trump" and were awaiting 'the Storm,' described as "a day of violence which will result in mass arrests, military trials, and executions of the members of the cabal."<sup>102</sup> At present, the Program has identified over a dozen individuals at the Capitol with an overt QAnon affiliation.<sup>103</sup>

Perhaps the most recognizable of those charged in relation to the events of January 6th is **Jacob Chansley**,<sup>104</sup> the so-called 'QAnon Shaman.'<sup>105</sup> Chansley, a 33-year-old

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<sup>99</sup> Amarasingam, Amarnath and Marc-André Argentino. 2020. "The QAnon Conspiracy Theory: A Security Threat in the Making?" CTC Sentinel 13 (7). The QAnon Conspiracy Theory: A Security Threat in the Making? – Combating Terrorism Center at West Point.; Garrett, Major. 2021 "It was a drug': Capitol riot exposes reach of QAnon disinformation." CBS News. January 31, 2021. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/qanon-capitol-riot-reach/>; Howley, Kerry. "QAnon and the Bright Rise of Belief." New York Magazine. January 29, 2021. <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/article/qanon-capitol-riot-bright-rise-belief.html>.

<sup>100</sup> Winter, Jara. 2019. "Exclusive: FBI document warns conspiracy theories are a new domestic terrorism threat." Yahoo News. August 1, 2019. Barnes, Julian E. 2021. "Biden Nominee Vows to Track Foreign Influence on Domestic Extremist Groups." The New York Times. January 19, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/19/us/politics/avril-haines-domestic-terror-qanon.html>.

<sup>101</sup> "Criminal Complaint." 2021. *United States of America v. Kenneth Grayson*. United States District Court for the District of Columbia, January 25, 2021. 1:21-mj-00163. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Kenneth%20Grayson%20Criminal%20Complaint.pdf>.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> "Capitol Hill Siege." 2021. Program on Extremism at George Washington University, accessed February 25, 2021. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/Capitol-Hill-Cases>.

<sup>104</sup> "Indictment." 2021. *United States of America v. Jacob Anthony Chansley*. United States District Court for the District of Columbia, January 11, 2021. 1:21-cr-00003-RCL. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Jacob%20Anthony%20Chansley%20Indictment.pdf>; "Government's Brief in Support of Detention." 2021. *United States of America v. Jacob Anthony Chansley*. United States District Court for the District of Columbia, January 14, 2021. 1:21-cr-00003-RCL. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Jacob%20Chansley%20Detention%20Memo.pdf>.

<sup>105</sup> Leonard, Ben. 2021. "QAnon shaman' granted organic food in jail after report of deteriorating health." Politico. February 3, 2021. <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/02/03/qanon-shaman-organic-food-465563>.

resident of Arizona, was charged with knowingly entering or remaining in any restricted building or grounds without lawful authority, and with violent entry and disorderly conduct on Capitol grounds.<sup>106</sup> Chansley, a supply clerk in the U.S. Navy from 2005-2007, was a conspicuous presence at QAnon and ‘Stop the Steal’ rallies since at least 2019.<sup>107</sup> The criminal complaint notes that Chansley was one of the rioters who entered the Senate Chamber, describing that he “ran up on the dais where Vice President Pence had been presiding just minutes before” and wrote a note to then-Vice President Pence saying “It’s Only A Matter Of Time. Justice Is Coming.”<sup>108</sup>



**Image 6:** A photo of rioters confronting law enforcement inside the Capitol, with one individual (alleged to be Douglas Jensen) ahead of the others and moving towards the officer with his arms outstretched. See reference 112.

<sup>106</sup> “Indictment.” 2021. *United States of America v. Jacob Anthony Chansley*.; “Three Men Charged in Connection with Events at U.S. Capitol.” 2021. Department of Justice Press Release, January 9, 2021. <https://www.justice.gov/usao-dc/pr/three-men-charged-connection-events-us-capitol>.

<sup>107</sup> Ziezulewicz, Geoff. 2021. “‘QAnon Shaman’ charged with storming the Capitol is a Navy veteran.” *NavyTimes*. January 11, 2021. <https://www.navytimes.com/news/your-navy/2021/01/12/qanon-shaman-charged-with-storming-the-capitol-is-a-navy-veteran/>.; Ruelas, Richard. 2021. “Longtime Arizona QAnon supporter in horned helmet joins storming of U.S. Capitol.” *AZCentral*. January 6, 2021. <https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/politics/arizona/2021/01/06/arizona-qanon-supporter-jake-angeli-joins-storming-u-s-capitol/6568513002/>.

<sup>108</sup> “Opposition to Defendant’s Emergency Motion for Pre-Trial Release.” 2021. *United States of America v. Jacob Anthony Chansley*. United States District Court for the District of Columbia, February 3, 2021. 1:21-cr-00003-RCL. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Jacob%20Anthony%20Chansley%20Govt%20Opposition%20to%20Defense%20Emergency%20Motion%20for%20Pre-trial%20Release.pdf>.

**Douglas Jensen**, seen in the above photo, was reported to be one of the first members of the mob to breach the Capitol.<sup>109</sup> Jensen, described in the criminal complaint as an adherent of QAnon, is alleged to have “led the crowd toward the officer in a menacing manner” towards a lone Capitol Police officer.<sup>110</sup> The complaint details that Jensen continued to lead the crowd “chasing the officer up the stairs” and that as Jensen “continued to advance in a menacing manner, with the crowd following behind him, forcing the officer to continue to retreat” until additional officers arrived in the area and stopped the crowd.<sup>111</sup> During the confrontation, the government alleges, “[the] Defendant reached into his pocket where we now know he had a knife.”<sup>112</sup> After Jensen turned himself in to the Des Moines Police Department in Iowa, he allegedly confessed to his criminal actions at the U.S. Capitol, and stated that he “intentionally positioned himself to be among the first people inside the United States Capitol because he was wearing his “Q” t-shirt and he wanted to have his t-shirt seen on video so that “Q” could “get the credit.”<sup>113</sup>

Also alleged to have been present at the Capitol was Pennsylvania resident **Kenneth Grayson**, who was photographed there wearing a black sweatshirt “bearing what appears to be...the insignia of the Gadsden flag on his left lapel,<sup>114</sup> and a yellow letter “Q” on his right lapel.”<sup>115</sup> The government alleges that Grayson, who also traveled to Washington, DC in November and December 2020 for rallies in support of then-President Trump, broadcasted live on his social media page from

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<sup>109</sup> Foley, Ryan J. 2021. “FBI: QAnon backer from Iowa was among 1st to breach Capitol.” ABC News. January 12, 2021. <https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/fbi-qanon-backer-iowa-1st-breach-capitol-75209458>.

<sup>110</sup> “Criminal Complaint and Statement of Facts.” 2021. *United States of America v. Douglas Austin Jensen*. United States District Court for the District of Columbia, January 26, 2021. 4:21-mj-00011-HCA. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Douglas%20Jensen%20Criminal%20Complaint%20and%20Statement%20of%20Facts.pdf>.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> “Motion for Emergency Stay and for Review of Release Order.” 2021. *United States of America v. Douglas Austin Jensen*. United States District Court for the District of Columbia, January 26, 2021. 4:21-mj-00011-HCA. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Douglas%20Austin%20Jensen%20Govt%20Motion%20for%20Emergency%20Stay%20and%20for%20Review%20of%20Release%20Order.pdf>.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> “Statement of Facts.” 2021. *United States of America v. Kenneth Grayson*. United States District Court for the District of Columbia, January 26, 2021. 1:21-mj-00163. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Kenneth%20Grayson%20Statement%20of%20Facts.pdf>.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.* The statement of facts notes that, based on “Grayson’s known ideological beliefs...‘Q’ in this instance is a reference to QAnon.



within the U.S. Capitol's Crypt after he had entered the building. The complaint further notes that Grayson received numerous messages from family members and associates, including one which stated, "Kenny they're in the Senate Chamber! Can you get in anywhere?? TAKE PHOTOS!!! TAKE DOCUMENTS!!"<sup>116</sup>

Finally, many of those alleged to have engaged in criminal actions at the U.S. Capitol appear to have been motivated and inspired primarily by a desire to prevent the certification of the electoral votes for the 2020 Presidential Election. According to publicly available evidence, these individuals were neither known domestic violent extremists nor part of organized, group mobilization efforts.



*Image 7: A photo taken from an officer's body camera allegedly showing Michael Lopatic charging at the officer. See reference 117.*

Many, like **Michael Lopatic**, publicly expressed their desire to "gather at the Capitol and to fight" to prevent the certification of the election in the days and weeks prior to January 6th.<sup>117</sup> Prior to his alleged criminal actions at the Capitol, the government notes that Michael Lopatic posted threatening messages about elected officials on social media, including a photograph of two dead pheasants. In the caption of this photo, he noted that he named the dead birds "Joe and Kamala."<sup>118</sup> He further posted that the election was a "Call to Arms," and days before the 6th he exhorted others to "assemble at the capital January 6, 2021," and that "United we stand, go forth and we fight."<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> "Government's Motion for Pretrial Detention." 2021. *United States of America v. Michael John Lopatic, Sr.* United States District Court for the District of Columbia, February 9, 2021. 2:21-mj-00220. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Michael%20John%20Lopatic%20Govt%20Motion%20for%20Pretrial%20Detention.pdf>.

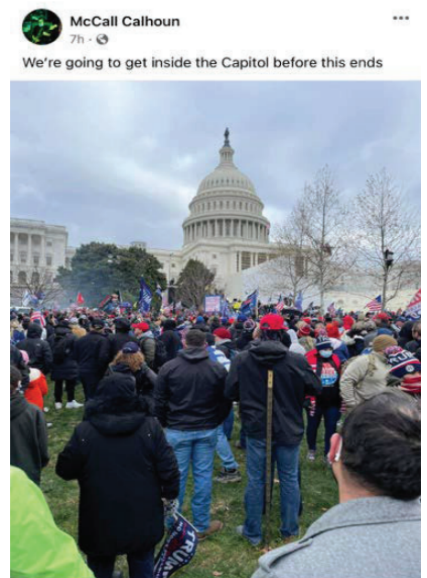
<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

According to the government motion for pretrial detention, Lopatic - seen to the right in a Trump 2020 shirt - charged at and assaulted a Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) officer positioned at the top of the steps of the Capitol, “continuously punching him in the head” before grabbing the officer by the head and appearing to hit him with an uppercut.<sup>120</sup>

The government further alleges that, after committing this assault, Lopatic descended the steps to where a second MPD officer had been dragged down the stairs “engulfed by the violent mob and assaulted.”<sup>121</sup> Upon reaching the MPD officer, Lopatic is alleged to have stolen the officer’s body camera and later “disposed of it on his way home to Lancaster County.”<sup>122</sup>

**William McCall Calhoun** is another individual alleged to have engaged in criminal activity at the Capitol in order to stop the certification of the Presidential election.<sup>123</sup> Prior to his alleged travel to the Capitol, Calhoun’s social media usage was brought to the attention of the FBI National Threat Operation Center, which received a tip from a concerned citizen on November 12, 2020. According to this tip, Calhoun posted messages on Facebook, Twitter and Parler encouraging individuals to storm Washington DC, as well as posts claiming “we are going to kill every last communist who stands in Trump’s way.”<sup>124</sup>



*Image 8: A photo from McCall Calhoun's Facebook page, taken in the middle of the crowd and capturing the crowd with the Capitol in the background. See reference 124.*

According to the affidavit, Calhoun posted additional messages on Parler indicating his intent to travel to Washington, DC to “demand fair elections now and forever - or else.”<sup>125</sup> While present at the Capitol, Calhoun posted a photo from the crowd with

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<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> “Affidavit in Support of Criminal Complaint and Arrest Warrant.” 2021. *United States of America v. William McCall Calhoun, Jr.*, United States District Court for the District of Columbia, February 9, 2021. 1:21-mj-00151-CCB. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/William%20McCall%20Calhoun%20Jr.%20Affidavit%20in%20Support%20of%20Criminal%20Complaint%20and%20Arrest%20Warrant.pdf>.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*



the caption “We’re going to get inside the Capitol before this ends.” Following his alleged illegal entry into the Capitol rotunda, Calhoun was interviewed by the Atlanta Journal Constitution on January 8th, and is quoted as stating “The crowd was of one mind. Everybody there had the same attitude. They felt they had been robbed of a fair election and the Congress wasn't listening to them.”<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

## ADDRESSING THE EVENTS OF JANUARY 6TH: RECOMMENDATIONS

### *Data*

For decades, law enforcement, researchers, and lawmakers struggled to answer a seemingly basic question: how large is the domestic violent extremism threat in America? In congressional testimonies, FBI leadership consistently states that there are 1,000 active investigations on domestic extremism at any given time.<sup>127</sup> However, this round number does not tell the whole story. Within the Bureau, domestic terrorism is an all-encompassing category that includes a variety of ideologies, including anti-government extremists, anarchists, anti-abortion extremists, white supremacists, involuntary celibates, ecoterrorists, and a smattering of other assorted extremists from across the political spectrum.

While the events of January 6th showed what happens when supporters of relatively disparate extremist movements coalesce around a singular event, there are distinctions and important differences that must be both counted and understood in order to properly allocate law enforcement resources against the threat. Additionally, the FBI does not distinguish in these numbers between its various levels of investigation; it is unclear which proportions of active investigations are made up of full-field investigations, preliminary investigations and assessments.

Therefore, **Congress should mandate, and the FBI should provide, a yearly and public report of the top-line numbers of full field FBI investigations, preliminary investigations, and assessments related to domestic terrorism cases.** These numbers should be further disaggregated by the number of cases involving each sub-category of domestic extremist ideologies. **In addition, because a full field investigation is decidedly different from an assessment or a preliminary investigation in terms of the FBI's legal and operational abilities and restrictions, any public reporting should identify which level of investigation is being undertaken for each of the domestic extremist categories.**

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<sup>127</sup> "Oversight of the Federal Bureau of Investigation," House Committee on the Judiciary, February 5, 2020. <https://judiciary.house.gov/calendar/eventsingle.aspx?EventID=2780>. See also: "Threats to the Homeland," U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, September 27, 2017. <https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/hearings/09/18/2017/threats-to-the-homeland>.

## ***A National Domestic Extremism Commission***

This report provides a preliminary assessment of the participants charged for their roles in the events of January 6th, but is by no means a definitive accounting of the Capitol Hill siege. As additional individuals are charged and arrested, court proceedings advance, and congressional testimonies are entered into the record, a fuller picture will emerge. It is also clear that many will continue to view the events of January 6th through partisan or political lenses, with their attendant facts and biases. **Congress should establish a nonpartisan Domestic Extremism Commission to identify any systemic national security and policy failures as well as the nature and scope of the domestic extremism threat.** The Commission should have subpoena power and public commitments by lawmakers and law enforcement officials that they will work with the Commission to complete its mission.

## ***Intelligence Review***

Recent Congressional hearings on the siege document both a failure to share information across agencies but, equally as important, a failure to heed the warnings that did come from actionable intelligence. The United States Capitol Police's own intelligence assessment leading up to January 6th warned that the protests "may lead to a significant dangerous situation for law enforcement and the general public alike."<sup>128</sup> A FBI office in Norfolk, Virginia issued similar warnings based on widely-available social media posts and other open-source information.<sup>129</sup> Congressional testimony from the summer also sounded the alarm of possible violence during a change of presidential administrations.<sup>130</sup>

In the lead-up to January 6th, the ever-increasing consistency, frequency, and persistence of these warnings may have led to a "drowning-out" of actionable intelligence, leading to a situation that made it potentially difficult for law

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<sup>128</sup> Leonnig, Carol D. "Capitol Police intelligence report warned three days before attack that 'Congress itself' could be targeted." The Washington Post. January 15, 2021. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/capitol-police-intelligence-warning/2021/01/15/c8b50744-5742-11eb-a08b-f1381ef3d207\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/capitol-police-intelligence-warning/2021/01/15/c8b50744-5742-11eb-a08b-f1381ef3d207_story.html).

<sup>129</sup> Barrett, D. and Matt Zapotosky. 2021. "FBI report warned of 'war' at Capitol, contradicting claims there was no indication of looming violence." The Washington Post. January 12, 2021. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/capitol-riot-fbi-intelligence/2021/01/12/30d12748-546b-11eb-a817-e5e7f8a406d6\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/capitol-riot-fbi-intelligence/2021/01/12/30d12748-546b-11eb-a817-e5e7f8a406d6_story.html).

<sup>130</sup> JJ McNab, "Assessing the Threat from Accelerationists and Militia Extremists," Testimony before the House Subcommittee on Intelligence and Counterterrorism (House Committee on Homeland Security), July 16, 2020. <https://homeland.house.gov/activities/hearings/assessing-the-threat-from-accelerationists-and-militia-extremists>

enforcement intelligence departments to separate the signal from the noise. While this does not excuse failure to act on available intelligence, as one senior government official put it, “there [was] too much noise in the system” at the time of the siege.<sup>131</sup> **The Intelligence Community, led by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, should perform a systematic review of intelligence reporting and response leading up to the Capitol Hill siege, with a particular focus on the question of concrete actions law enforcement should have taken with the increasing frequency of warning signs.**

### ***Use Existing Structures***

Sweeping modifications to law enforcement and intelligence structures are unlikely to come to fruition in the near-term, given the political dynamics and lack of consensus related to the events of January 6th. The Biden Administration is likely to face significant political pushback on legislation that proposes a post-9/11-like restructuring, either through the creation of new law enforcement and/or intelligence agencies or through additions of new statutes to the criminal code. Instead, the Administration should consider adjusting and increasing existing structures to combat domestic extremism through discrete legislative changes. The National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), created as part of the Intelligence Reform Act of 2004, has a well-worn model of effective coordination with the disparate U.S. intelligence and law enforcement agencies. It also has a system in place to address ‘U.S. person’ data that has been reviewed, debated, and adjusted by civil liberties lawyers within and outside of the U.S. Government for years.

**The NCTC should expand its mandate beyond international terrorism to include domestic extremism.** Under this mandate, the NCTC should continue its coordinative role on counterterrorism issues, assisting in efforts to improve intelligence sharing between the various federal agencies tasked with countering domestic violent extremism. This expansion of the NCTC mandate is also particularly relevant as domestic members of white supremacist and neo-Nazi movements continue to develop connections with ideologically-aligned individuals and groups overseas.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> PoE Interview with senior U.S. Government official, January 2021

<sup>132</sup> “White supremacy a ‘transnational threat’, U.N. chief warns.” *Reuters*. February 22, 2021. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-un-rights/white-supremacy-a-transnational-threat-u-n-chief-warns-idUSKBN2AM0NX>.

### ***Information Sharing between FBI and DoD***

After the November 2009 Fort Hood terrorist attack by a U.S. soldier inspired by jihadist ideology, the Department of Justice and the Department of Defense performed a wholesale review of its active investigation information sharing structure.<sup>133</sup> It identified significant failures to share details between the departments on ongoing international terrorism FBI investigations involving military members. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed and offered a formal structure to ensure information was passed along.<sup>134</sup> As this report finds, a significant number of the January 6th rioters had a military background.<sup>135</sup> **The FBI and the Department of Defense should review and enhance their extremism information sharing agreements to ensure they include domestic extremism.** Additionally, information sharing should not be narrowly limited to merely active-duty military members under investigation. If the Bureau has a full investigation, preliminary investigation, or assessment open on a military member, former military member, defense contractor with access to military bases, and others in the Department of Defense (DoD) ecosystem that should be shared in a comprehensive and systematic way between the Departments. A Department of Defense official stated that the DoD received more than 60 notifications from the FBI last year on domestic extremism.<sup>136</sup> A cursory review of arrests and attacks by domestic extremists in the prior year would indicate that the notification number is an incomplete picture of the total numbers of active law enforcement investigations involving current and former military members. Finally, many law enforcement investigations on domestic extremism begin at the state and local level. **The Administration must develop a comprehensive system to assess and ensure that information pertaining to state and local domestic extremism investigations of military members is shared with the FBI and DoD.**

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<sup>133</sup> ““Ticking Time Bomb” Fort Hood Massacre Could Have Been Prevented,” Majority Media, U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, February 3, 2011. [https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/media/majority-media/ticking-time-bomb\\_fort-hood-massacre-could-have-been-prevented](https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/media/majority-media/ticking-time-bomb_fort-hood-massacre-could-have-been-prevented)

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> At the time of publication, the Program has identified 33 individuals with a military background.

<sup>136</sup> PoE Interview with Department of Defense official, February 2021

## CONCLUSION

The Capitol Hill Siege was a shock but not a surprise. While few would have expected the lapse in security which allowed participants to get as far into the Capitol building as they did, many experts expected to see an increase in extreme-right-wing violence in America sparked by the imminent changing of administrations in the White House. The event itself and those who took part can help us to understand the nature, capabilities and future activities of violent extreme-right actors in America.

Perhaps the most striking finding in this report is the range of far- and extreme-right actors who took part in the siege. While such groups often splinter across various lines and form bitter rivalries with one another, it is clear that in some cases they have found enough common cause to mobilize together. The siege is not the first recent example of increased alliances among disparate right-wing groups in America. The Charlottesville Unite the Right Rally in 2017, for example, while a different kind of event, also succeeded in bringing together a range of American groups over, among other things, their deeply-held conspiratorial antisemitism.

Alongside this apparent increase in cooperation, equally concerning is the involvement of organized and established extremist groups with histories of violence, which we have defined in the report as militant networks. The participation in January 6th of groups like the Oath Keepers and Three Percenters, who we found had made detailed plans to breach the Capitol building and commit attacks, marked a significant escalation in their activities to date. However, this is not the first act of anti-government extremism against the federal government in recent years, and is likely part of a trend of increased activity among such groups. It may be useful, for example, to draw parallels with the involvement of Oath Keepers in the 2014 Bundy standoff and Three Percenters in the October 2020 plot to kidnap the Governor of Michigan, Gretchen Whitmer. The siege will likely embolden such extreme-right militants to pursue other ambitious attacks against either the U.S. government or the wider population, and inspire yet more individual violent actors.

While individuals in the militant networks category made up only a fraction of the overall participants in the siege, it is not surprising that we found they played an outsize role in key moments of the event, as well as in organizing the behavior of other individual participants. Without the involvement of experienced militant

networks, it is unlikely that the Capitol siege would have succeeded in going as far as it did.

Analysis of the individuals within the other two categories of participants, organized cells and inspired believers, also helps to inform understanding of extreme-right violence. Initial data seems to confirm the trend of an increased role played by what can be termed as ‘conspiracy communities’ in right-wing extremism and violence in America. To take one example, the QAnon conspiracy theory about who really controls America and the nefarious intentions of a secretive cabal of elites who intend to destroy the nation has served as the building block of a shared collective identity which has helped form online communities that at times have mobilized in the real world. January 6th was only the latest and most violent example of this phenomenon.

Within these categories too we are able to recognize dynamics identified in wider literature about radicalization which relates to how and why people take up certain beliefs and act on them, often collectively. Most importantly, the initial data demonstrates the importance of involvement in friendship or kinship networks as a key factor in encouraging increasingly extreme beliefs and high-risk, often violent, activism. The involvement of inspired believers in particular is also a reminder of both the role of ideology, without the need for organizational links, in inspiring violence and the potential for increased lone-actor involvement in extreme-right inspired violence in the future.

As is almost invariably the case with any form of extremist activity, social media has also played a central role in the organization of the siege and the dissemination of material which helped to inspire involvement in it. In this case, mainstream social media organizations appear to have been the platforms of choice for participants, both before the event for organizational purposes, and during when it was used to coordinate violent activity and post updates, often in the form of pictures or videos. It is on social media platforms too where the conspiracy theories which partly motivated the violence are most widely disseminated and accessible. In the wake of the siege, many mainstream sites such as Google and Facebook have taken a number of measures against this, in particular targeting QAnon-related content and accounts for removal. While content removal may mitigate the influence of such



conspiracy theories, it will need to form part of a wider strategy to combat disinformation both online and in the real world.

The events of January 6th also allow us an opportunity to assess how the domestic violent extremist threat may take shape in the coming months and years, and if the siege may have some role in this. As law enforcement officials continue to identify and prosecute individuals involved in the storming of the Capitol on January 6th, new cases of domestic violent extremists inspired by the siege to conduct their own violent attacks have already emerged. Since the siege, federal law enforcement arrested at least four individuals with links to domestic violent extremist ideologies — one involving a militia affiliate from Northern California and another involving two associates of the Boogaloo Boys in Kentucky, all of whom reportedly believed that the siege would spark a new civil war in the United States. Moving forward, it is highly likely that violent extremists of multiple ideological persuasions, inspired by the events of January 6, 2021, will add to the already bloated federal domestic extremism caseload for prosecutors throughout the country.



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